Purpose

In all communications the school attempts to build trust and a sense of belonging to a wider community as outlined in the school strategic plan.

The schools approach to handling concerns and issues is based on our school values of:
- Integrity
- Trust
- Respect
- Acceptance
- Optimism
- Teamwork
- Lifelong learning
- Commitment and
- Friendliness

The Communication Protocol Policy and Guidelines are aimed at addressing any parent concerns or issues effectively. It is based on the “policy and guides” booklet from Department of Education and Early Childhood (DEECD) April 2009.

Aim:
- to assist staff to confidently address the concerns of parents
- to ensure balance between the rights of all parties involved and
- to ensure parents will have clear processes to follow with the HPS Home – School Communication Guidelines.

Concerns or other matters:

Parents/guardians will often have concerns and questions about aspects of the school’s operations. It is expected that such concerns or questions will initially be raised in accordance with the HPS Home-School Communications Guidelines (brochure attached).

If a parent is not satisfied with the response received to their concern or questions, then they are able to make a complaint in accordance with the process outlined in the HPS Complaints Policy.

The principal or Regional Office can advise about specific procedures for complaints of these types (refer HPS to Student Engagement Policy, the HPS Complaints Policy and DEECD’s Addressing parents’ concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guide).

Concerns and issues covered in this policy include:
- general issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the student code of conduct outlined in the HPS Student Engagement Policy (on the HPS website),
- incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom and school yard
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents
- school fees and payments
- general administration issues
any other school related matters except as listed below.

Matters not covered by this policy and the associated guidelines, for which there are existing rights of review or appeal include:

- student discipline matters involving expulsions
- complaints and employee conduct or performance and complaints that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action
- student critical incidents
- other criminal matters.

The principal or Regional Office can advise about specific procedures for complaints of these types.

Ownership and scope:

The school has developed this policy, procedures and guidelines in consultation with all members of the school community. The policy and associated guidelines relate to students, parents and staff.

The School and School Council will consider parent complaints and issues raised through the parent complaints process, as well as any other relevant information from the Parent Opinion Survey, when undertaking a review of the school’s policies, procedures and operations.

The school will review its information about complaints made over time to:

- identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing
- assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed
- use information provided to school through the Parents Opinion Survey on the views of parents.

This policy will be reviewed as part of the 4 year cycle.

Expectations:

The school expects a person raising a complaint to:

- do so in a prompt manner as soon as the issue occurs
- provide a detailed factual account of the concern in writing
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- act in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner
- show respect and understanding of each other’s perspective and value difference, rather than judge and blame
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

The school will address any complaints:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- promptly or within the suggested timeframe or agreement with the complainant and
- in accordance with DEECD’s regulatory framework.

Making a complaint:

A parent/guardian can raise a concern or issue about any aspect of the school’s operations.

The complainant should set out the details of the concern or issue via a face to face meeting or in writing delivered via email, mail or handed to the office addressed to either the principal or assistant principal, regarding issues relating to staff members, complex student issues or welfare concerns, school concerns regarding the curriculum, school policy and school management. The principal and / or assistant principal will ensure correct details are promptly recorded in the school’s register of complaints.
Managing Parent complaints information:

The school will maintain a register of complaints and record the following details of all complaints received:

- name and contact details of the person with a complaint
- the date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- a brief description of the complaint
- details of the school officer responding to the complaint
- action taken on the complaint
- the outcome of the action taken on the complaint
- any recommendations for the future improvement in the school’s policy and procedures.

Help with raising complaints:

Personal support is most appropriate in situations where the complainant and others involved in the complaint process have emotional issues related to the complaint.

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly (an advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service).

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is a difficulty coming to an agreement.

The school will ensure that the complainant is aware of these supports.

A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention.

Addressing the complaint:

A parent can raise a complaint about any aspect of the school’s operations. The school will make every effort to resolve complaints before involving any other levels of DEECD.

Complaints should be addressed in the manner as outlined:

- All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly.
- The school will give a complainant a copy of this policy upon receiving the complaint.
- The school will acknowledge all complaints promptly via email or mail. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.
- The designated person as outlined in the policy (principal or assistant principal) will investigate the complaint and will provide a response to the complainant.
- The school will make every attempt to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible.
- Should the complaint involve many students and a range of issues, the school may need more time to investigate and resolve it.
- Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from DEECD’s regional office which may take more time. The school will advise the complainant of any new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons for any delay.
- In most cases, the school will try and resolve a complaint within 20 school days.

Remedies:

If a complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school will offer an appropriate remedy in consultation with the complainant. The school will endeavour to keep the complainant up to date with progress during this process. For example, depending on the circumstances, the school may offer:

- an explanation or further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- an apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- to change its decision
to change its policies, procedures or practices
- to cancel a debt (such as for school payments)
- a fee refund.

The school will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

**Referral of complaints:**


If a person with a complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the DEECD’s appropriate regional office on (03) 8765 5600.

The officer from the region will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant’s opinion about why the school did not resolve it to their satisfaction.

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and regional office working together, the regional office may refer it to the DEECD’s Group Coordination Division. The division will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the complaint and the complainant’s opinion about why the school and regional office did not resolve it to their satisfaction and will ask the complainant to outline their view on the course of action required to resolve the complaint.

If the complainant is unable to provide a written account the officer from Group Coordination Division should act on the information provided.

**Communication and Training:**

The school will make information about procedures for addressing complaints readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy-to understand language and, where appropriate, in a range of community languages and formats that are accessible to everyone so that no-one is disadvantaged.

The information will include:

- how a person can make a complaint
- the person’s responsibilities
- information to be provided by the person
- who the person should contact and their contact detail
- the process and timeframes for managing complaints.

The school’s procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- published on the school’s website
- printed in a leaflet given to a parent when their child enrols
- printed in the parent’s handbook
- printed in the school newsletter
- publicised on a poster displayed in public areas of the school.

The school will:

- annually brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address complaints
- provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures
- ensure staff who manage complaints demonstrate the personal attributes outlined in the *Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria’s guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies.*
Review:

The School Council will monitor parent complaints and consider issues raised through the parent complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the school’s policies, procedures and operations. The school council will regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

The school will review its information about complaints made over time to:

- identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing
- assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed
- use information provided to the school through the parent opinion survey on the views of parents.

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school’s four-year review cycle